

## Two Ways of Living Life

Mark 10:32-45

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Some lessons are harder to learn than others.

- We're not as good as we think we are.
- We are not defective just because we are different from others.
- People don't find you near as funny as you find yourself.
- A good marriage does not come without hard work.
- No matter how much you make in life, spending a little more than what you have is always easier.
- Golf is a game that is Satan's revenge on God's creation.
- Teenagers are Satan's revenge on God's creation.

As we look at our text this morning, it may feel like we are hearing much the same thing we have heard for several weeks. Jesus is trying to get the disciples to understand what is soon to come and the disciples are still busy jockeying for position. We have traced these same themes through Mark's last few chapters.

There is a simple rule in life and in reading the Bible: If the teacher keeps repeating something, it is something you should pay attention to. Likewise, we should pay attention as we look at a couple of familiar themes.

<sup>32</sup>They were now on the way up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. The disciples were filled with awe, and the people following behind were overwhelmed with fear. Taking the twelve disciples aside, Jesus once more began to describe everything that was about to happen to him. <sup>33</sup>"Listen," he said, "we're going up to Jerusalem, where the Son of Man will be betrayed to the leading priests and the teachers of religious law. They will sentence him to die and hand him over to the Romans. <sup>34</sup>They will mock him, spit on him, flog him with a whip, and kill him, but after three days he will rise again."

Before we look at what Jesus was teaching, let's look at the odd words: "they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid." We want to ask, "Why were they amazed and some afraid?" It could be because of what Jesus had been trying to teach them about His mission, it could be because Jesus said it was as hard for the rich to get into Heaven as trying to thread a needle with a camel. It could just be the fact that Jesus had a powerful presence even though He was kind and caring.

### THE WAY OF SACRIFICE

In this first section (32-34), Jesus, for the third time, tried to get the disciples to brace themselves for what was coming. He adds even more to what he had told them before. From these words, it is important for us to see FOUR things about our Lord and Savior.

**He Went to the Cross Knowingly.** It is readily apparent that Jesus knew exactly what was going to happen. It was the plan all along . . . from all eternity. The Triune God had planned this act of redemption a long time ago. Jesus was not surprised by what happened in Jerusalem over Passover. He told people what was going to happen before it actually happened! He was specific: betrayed by the priest, sentenced to die, handed over to the Romans, mock Him, kill Him, and he would rise again after three days!

**Second, He went to the cross willingly.** Since Jesus knew what was going to happen, he could have easily avoided arrest. If I knew there were people who were gunning for me, I would head in a different direction. But not Jesus! He knew what His job was and so we are told in Luke 9:51

<sup>51</sup>As the time drew near for him to ascend to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. <sup>52</sup>He sent messengers ahead to a Samaritan village to prepare for his arrival.

The King James version said, "Jesus 'set his face' to go to Jerusalem." He knew what the Father's will was and Jesus was determined to follow through. This shows His obedience and also his love for we who are lost in our trespasses and our sins. He knew He was our only chance at redemption. His love is so great that He would not let us down. Of that we would respond to Him in the same manner.

**Third, He went to the cross Confidently.** The only time Jesus seemed even a little reluctant, was when He was in the Garden of Gethsemane. Otherwise, when He stood before the Jewish Court He was in control. When He was brought before Pilate and Herod he remained quiet, maintaining his composure. Jesus was determined. He was conscious on the cross and refused painkillers. He ministered to the responsive thief. Only a self-confident man can do these things in the midst of a crisis.

Jesus was confident because he knew he was going to rise again. The resurrection gives us a hope that transcends the fear of death. . . as long as we hold fast to that hope! It is one thing to say that you believe in the resurrection as a historical event, it is another to believe in that reality as you are facing your own possible demise.

Finally, **Jesus went to the cross purposefully.** Jump down to the end of our passage in verse 45:

For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Jesus came to give his life as a ransom for many. We are all aware of what a ransom is: it is a price paid for the release of someone from bondage. The bondage we were in was to sin and the sin nature that all of us possess. Satan had us right where he wanted us . . . as those who could not stand in the presence of God because of our failures and blemishes.

So, to whom was the ransom paid? This is a question that leads to many different answers. Most popular is that the ransom was paid to Satan so we could be free. I don't believe that is the correct answer. Satan is not the one offended by our sin. He is not the One who gives punishment for our sin. God is. Jesus was paying the ransom for the sin we had committed against Him!

It is like the father who is trying to discipline his child for some act of misbehavior. Dad explains what the child did wrong and says the punishment is going to be three hits with dad's belt. Then dad hands the belt to his son and has him whip him. The debt was paid. The wrong was righted. But, the just suffered for the unjust. That dad took the penalty that the son deserved. It is the same way with the cross. The son took our place to set us free. It is a lesson that little boy would never forget and would be wise not to forget it either.

- What does He set us free from? First, He frees us from the condemnation of sin. In other words, he makes it possible for us to stand flawlessly before God. We are given the opportunity to live forever.
- Second, we are freed from the domination of sin. Jesus broke the power of sin in our lives. It has no power over innocent people! In other words, we don't "have to" sin anymore. We all *do* continue to sin because it is our habit. We need to learn a new way of living . . . as free people rather than as slaves.
- Third, we are freed to live the life we were created to live. God did not create us to live in constant rebellion and turmoil. He created us to walk with Him and enjoy Him every day of our lives. In Titus 2:14 Paul says" God wanted to transform us into a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good."
- Fourth we are freed from having to "prove" ourselves. The Lord loves us as we are and takes us as we are and begins His work in us. He does not say to the One who really believes: "Thank you for believing, but here are some things you need to do before. You can be my follower." He takes us with our scars and warts and failures.
- Fifth, He frees us from bitterness and anger. We see that we are sinful people in need of grace. This helps us to cut other people a break. We have received forgiveness and grace and we should be willing to extend that same grace to others.

Tim Keller wrote,

If you are always looking at yourself ... The self is a terrible taskmaster because you're always feeling hurt, because you're always comparing yourself with other people, or because you always feel you're being shunned. You always feel like someone is not treating you properly. You always feel you're on the outside. These are the marks of the bondage of the self, because you're looking at yourself. What ends up happening is the great business of your life, whether you know it or not, is the self-protection, protecting the hypersensitive self which is in the center. That's a bondage.

The key thing to see here is the first way of living that Jesus promotes is living your life for others . . . and that starts with living our lives for the Lord! Jesus calls us to a life of humble service.

## The Way of Self-Promotion

<sup>35</sup> Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came over and spoke to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do us a favor.”

<sup>36</sup> “What is your request?” he asked.

<sup>37</sup> They replied, “When you sit on your glorious throne, we want to sit in places of honor next to you, one on your right and the other on your left.”

<sup>38</sup> But Jesus said to them, “You don’t know what you are asking! Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of suffering I am about to drink? Are you able to be baptized with the baptism of suffering I must be baptized with?”

<sup>39</sup> “Oh yes,” they replied, “we are able!”

Then Jesus told them, “You will indeed drink from my bitter cup and be baptized with my baptism of suffering. <sup>40</sup> But I have no right to say who will sit on my right or my left. God has prepared those places for the ones he has chosen.”

<sup>41</sup> When the ten other disciples heard what James and John had asked, they were indignant. <sup>42</sup> So Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. <sup>43</sup> But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, <sup>44</sup> and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else.

This approach to living is in contrast with what Jesus did. Jesus is trying to help the disciples get ready for the crisis that is just on the horizon, and these guys are angling for positions of honor and privilege.

When we compare the gospel accounts, Mark says James and John came and asked Jesus for a favor, while Matthew says it was the mother of James and John (Salome) who asked for the favor. I am going to assume this may have been a mutual “ask.”

What is staggering to me is the fact that Jesus had just told them he was going to die and still they are asking Him to have the seats of honor next to Him. Did they not understand what Jesus was saying, or did they hear about the resurrection and they wanted to reign with Him?

Jesus tried to help them see what they were asking. First, he asked them if they could drink the cup (of suffering) he would have to drink. They were sure they were up to any task that involved standing with or for Him. Jesus (knowing the future) said they would indeed drink of that cup. James was the first martyr of the disciples. John was the last disciple to die. However, John was exiled to an island for prisoners (where he wrote the book of Revelation).

Second, Jesus told them that who sits on His right and left was something the Father did, not Him. This is again one of those mysteries of the Trinity. There are three persons who are each in perfect unity with the others. However, they are not the same. They each have roles to play. Jesus says, it is the Father’s job to decide who will reign at the right and left of Jesus. In fact, the Father has already prepared those places for someone.

Jesus then went back to reiterate what He had said before, “James and John are thinking like the world and not like the Savior of the world.”

In the world, greatness is seen as influence, position, numbers, income streams, notoriety, and so forth. However, in God’s Kingdom, greatness is defined by humility, service to the Lord and each other, and obedience and faithfulness before the Lord. James and John were not looking at greatness through the eyes and definition of Jesus. They were looking for an advantage, a way to guarantee a high position . . . whatever was going to happen.

When the other disciples heard about their request, they were ticked off. Why? It’s likely because they wish they had thought of it first! So, Jesus pulled them aside and tried to drive home His point one more time,

“You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. <sup>43</sup> But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, <sup>44</sup> and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else.

Jesus is building a different kind of Kingdom . . . it is not about beating out other people, it is helping them. It is not about gaining accolades, it is about building others up. It is not about “winning” it is about serving. One commentator summarizes what Jesus was saying well,

A real leader has a servant’s heart, willingly helping out others as needed. Servant leaders appreciate others’ worth and realize that they’re not above any job. They work together, not trying to gain positions of status or authority. They don’t keep count of who did what or why. They aren’t jealous about someone else’s gifts, but gladly fulfill their duties. The disciples could not mistake Jesus’ explanation that they were to serve sacrificially. Only with such an attitude would the disciples be able to carry out the mission of sharing the gospel across the world. Jesus was their perfect example of a servant leader.<sup>1</sup>

Keller also helps us here:

A servant is somebody who now says, “I don’t have to jockey for position. I don’t have to always be trying to make sure everybody likes me or knows me. I don’t need any thanks anymore. It’s my job to move out and see what people need and give it to them.”

A servant is somebody who makes you feel so valuable, because he or she is lavished with affirmation, but it’s never maudlin or vague. It’s always specific and sincere and real. A servant is somebody who just focuses on you. Bonhoeffer says it’s a natural impulse of the human heart when you meet somebody else you immediately look for a position of strategic

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce B. Barton, *Mark*, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), 305.

superiority. You automatically say, “What does this person think of me? Is this the kind of person I want? Is this the kind of person I want to know?”<sup>2</sup>

## Two Choices

As we saw earlier, Jesus concluded this discourse by pointing out that we are to serve like He did: giving His life as a ransom for many. In other words, he wants us to stop trying to advance our own cause and instead follow His example. He wants us to take our eyes off of ourselves and instead work to see others the way that He does.

But how do we start? Like the disciples, these worldly ways are deeply ingrained in us. We naturally look for a way to gain an advantage for ourselves. We want to paint ourselves in the best light possible. And we have seen that this is exactly the attitude that Jesus wants us to give up. To get there it seems we need to start by,

1. See how needy we are. We are not believers because we have earned anything. We are in the Kingdom of God because God became a man to serve us by going to the cross on our behalf. There is something wonderfully refreshing about accepting the fact that we have not earned what we have. It is given to us as a gift. He has served us and asks us to serve others. We do not have to “earn” this. We can relax and serve others.
2. Remind yourself that the Kingdom we are building (or even the church we are building) is not ours . . . it belongs to the Lord and He is to be the One glorified and honored. The Bible does not say in the end “every knee will bow and every tongue confess that you are better than other people.” No, we will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Keep the main thing, the main thing.
3. Looking for little (or what people think are menial) things and do them. Pick up someone else’s litter. Befriend someone who will not help your social standing. Help with the dishes (even if you didn’t dirty them). Pay for someone’s meal. Hold the door for someone else. Learn people’s names (especially people you see every day). Visit someone who can’t get out. Pray for people going through tough times. Make a meal for someone who is struggling. Make it a point to let others know that you appreciate their service. Acknowledge a birthday or special day. Compliment someone else’s child. Share the gospel with anyone whenever the opportunity presents itself.

There are two different ways we can live: for Him, or for ourselves. There are two very different attitudes: one seeks to exalt self and, the other seeks to exalt Him by serving others. One way may lead to the applause and envy of the world, but the other will yield the “Well Done! Of our Master.”

The disciples may have been slow, but they learned this lesson well. They changed the world. Let’s hope we learn the lesson as well as they did. Our future as a people, may depend on it.

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<sup>2</sup> Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).